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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004971

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SUBJECT: FALLUJANS MOBILIZED FOR ELECTION AMID INCREASED TENSION IN CITY

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT FORD, REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Fallujans stand mobilized for the December 15 election. Momentum flowing from the October 15 referendum - when an estimated 200,000 residents in the city and surrounding communities voted - should lead to repeat high turnout. Campaign posters and fliers dot the city; Ahmed Chalabi-funded mobile phone text messages also fill the airwaves. Fallujah leaders, most prominently imams, continue to urge citizens to participate in the election. The recent murder of Sheikh Hamza Abbas Al-Issawi, Fallujah's mufti, appears to have galvanized but also unnerved residents. Overt intimidation directed toward clerics has led to more tension in the city. Fallujah leaders believe the ITG will renege on its preliminary commitment to pay USD 75 million in compensation for damaged homes. Non-payment might elicit demonstrations in the city and risk reversing hard-won momentum at a crucial time. Emboffs have met with ITG Finance Minister Allawi to urge movement on more compensation funds for Fallujah. Allawi has indicated he is willing to provide more funds but not USD 75 million chunk all at once. END SUMMARY.

CITY MOBILIZED TO VOTE;
HIGH TURNOUT EXPECTED

2. (C) Fallujah leaders anticipate high turnout election day. Sheikh Kamal Shakir Al-Nazal, city council chairman, told Poloff and Marines December 6, 2005, that "everyone is ready; 100 percent will participate." (Note: turnout in the city for the October referendum was estimated to be 90 percent. End Note). The successful security arrangement for the referendum - referred to in IECI circles as the "Fallujah model" - will be repeated. Iraqi police will serve as the inner cordon, with Marines and Iraqi Army in the outer rings. Approximately the same number of polling sites - 62 for the greater Fallujah area - will be manned by IECI employees. COMMENT: Sheikh Kamal and Mayor Dhari expressed concern about Iraqi Islamic Party-affiliated workers, who dominated the IECI employee rosters for the October 15 vote. They raised this matter with IECI Commissioner Izadin at a November 29 IECI outreach session in Fallujah. END COMMENT.

CAMPAIGN SEASON: POSTERS,
FLIERS AND TEXT MESSAGES

3. (C) Fallujah streets contain numerous election-related posters. Fallujah Poloff and Marines have observed many while conveying throughout the city. The most prominent include campaign material for Slate 667 (Iraq Front for National Dialogue), led by Salih Mutlak, and Slate 618 (Iraqi Concord Front), a list that comprises the IIP, Iraqi National Dialogue Council and the Iraqi National Gathering. Local candidates - to include the city mayor, Sheikh Dhari, and city council chairman, Sheikh Kamal - have complained about the lack of funds to get their message out.

4. (C) The local city paper, Al Bishara, has run full-page political ads. One of its reporters told Fallujah Poloff that fliers supporting Ayad Allawi were present in the city. Another Fallujah-based candidate, Engineer Farouk Abd Mohammed Al-Issawi, told Poloff and Marine FAO that he has been in effect stumping in nearby communities. When asked about possible intimidation, Farouk replied that he felt safe because of his tribal affiliation, one of the area's largest. (Note: Engineer Farouk heads the Iraqi National Political Council - list number 833. End Note.)

5. (C) Notably, mobile phone numbers in Fallujah also have received text messages on behalf of Ahmed Chalabi. They read: "If you are with us, nothing is difficult - Dr. Ahmed Chalabi, List 569."

MUFTI'S MURDER GALVANIZES;
WHILE MORE IMAMS TARGETED

6. (C) The November 30, 2005, murder of Fallujah's revered

mufti, Sheikh Hamza, shook the city. Resident widely perceived the religious leader to be "above politics" - and thereby virtually untouchable. One prominent imam and Fallujah City Council member, Sheikh Abdul Sittar, told Poloff and Marine FAO that the mufti's murder "has woken us all from a deep sleep." He added that city imams would not tell residents how to vote, a position that the late mufti had made explicit - "we cannot pick favorites."

17. (C) Other clerics reportedly have been targeted by insurgents, to include Sheikh Kamal, who claims he has received death threats by phone. He sought a weapons permit so his teenage son could stand guard at his home during nighttime. Mayor Dhari and Sheikh Kamal have requested that Marines allow selected imams to carry sidearms. Marines are currently reviewing this proposal in coordination with city leaders.

COMPENSATION: ITG WON'T PAY;
DEMONSTRATIONS MIGHT ENSUE

18. (C) Fallujans regularly criticize the ITG's failure to pay any compensation for homes damaged during Operation Al Fajr. (NOTE: The IIG's PM Allawi provided approximately USD 100 million for initial "down payments" amounting to 40 percent of estimated costs; these funds have since been depleted. END NOTE.) Follow-on ITG leaders initially committed to providing USD 75 million in funds for Fallujah, but the money has yet to be released. Sheikh Kamal told Fallujah Poloff and Marine FAO December 8 that Fallujans widely believed the funds would not be paid - and that demonstrations might result. Kamal frankly added that past demonstrations had led to violence. Poloff agreed, and urged that he and other city leaders work to keep the people off the streets. Kamal said he would try.

COMMENT

19. (C) Our engagement and rebuilding efforts in Fallujah have entered a crucial phase. High turnout in the December 15 election will be a testament to the concerted effort of city leaders to mobilize the populace, combined with effective security led by Iraqis and supported by Marines. They will have delivered a significant number of votes twice in two months and will subsequently seek more satisfaction, and accountability, from Baghdad. Whether Mayor Dhari and Sheikh Kamal, Fallujah's favored sons, will secure enough votes to gain seats in the next government remains to be seen. Both seem convinced lack of funds dramatically reduces their odds. They have not indicated for which list they are candidates.

110. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: Increased intimidation against city imams - the most important group in the city, alongside U.S. Marines - will need to be monitored closely. So far, imams have helped blunt insurgent messages, particularly by encouraging political participation. The now-deceased mufti, Sheikh Hamza, had implicitly blessed a cooperative tone with the coalition since Operation Al Fajr. Should the ITG fail to deliver any compensation funds, the stage might be set for even more volatility in city streets - despite Fallujah's steady political gains. Embosffs have met with ITG Finance Minister Allawi to urge forward movement on more compensation funds for Fallujah. Allawi has indicated he is willing to provide more funds but not a USD 75 million chunk all at once.

KHALILZAD